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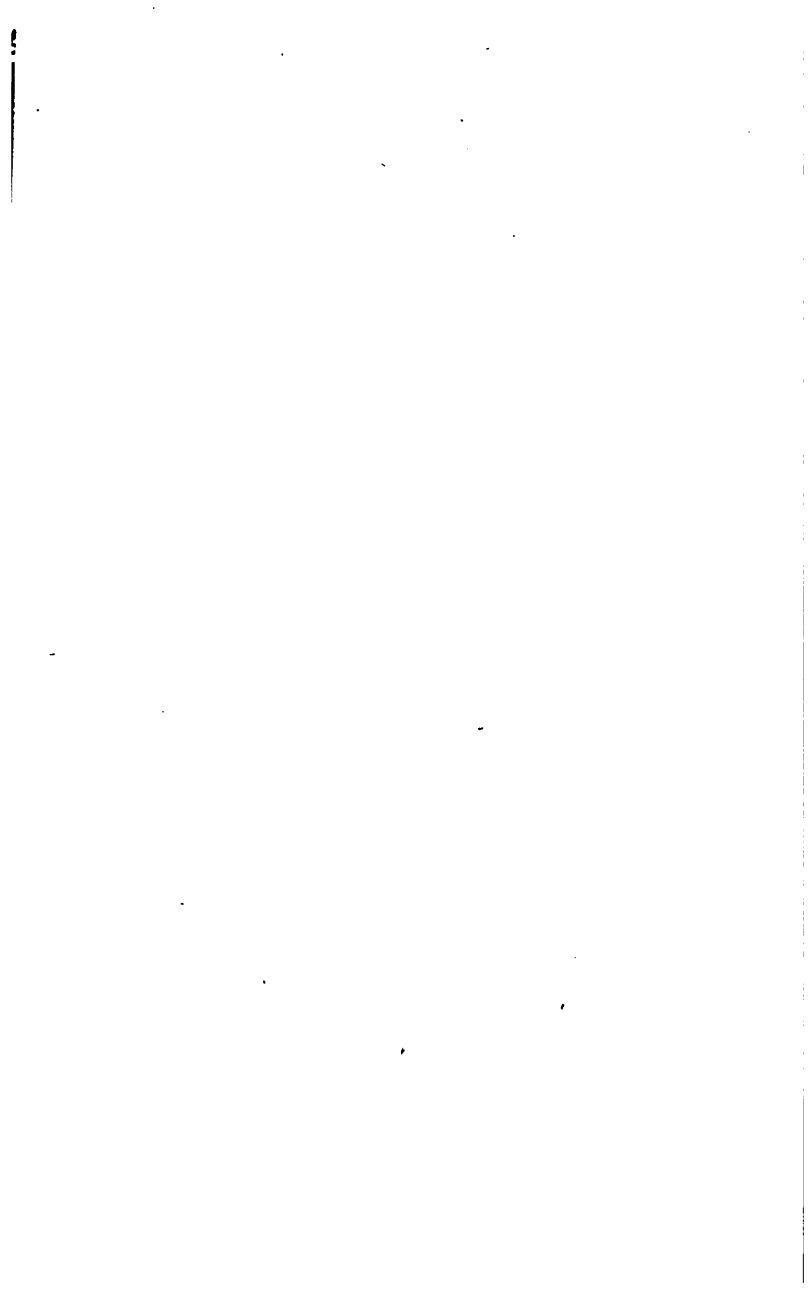
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FIFTY FABLES

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Other Peoples's Wings

&c.

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At the Sign of the Unicorn

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To

ALBERT KINROSS.

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THE Author's acknowledgments are due to the Editors of 'The Outlook,' 'The Dome,' and 'The Academy,' in which journals certain of the following Fables have appeared.

FIFTY FABLES

Possessions.

A POET went on a visit to a great lord.

And one morning the great lord said to him: 'Come, and I will show you my domain.'

And all that day they rode and rode, and the great lord waved his hand in an 'All mine!' kind of way.

Until at evenfall the stars came out, each in his appointed place. And, perceiving that the poet regarded them wistfully, the great lord said: 'Marvellous, are they not?'

'Yes,' quoth the poet, waking up. '*Yours and mine!*'

Excused.

‘ I WAS particularly anxious that you should remain with Mister Splitverse,’ frowned Apollo.

‘ But he is a dreadful person,’ wept the little Muse. ‘ He kept on saying, “ Sing, Muse!” in parenthesis, all the time ; and at last I shouted, “ Sing yourself!” and came away.’

‘ Ah—well—of course!’ remarked Apollo.

Armed.

AN ass cried unto Jupiter, saying, ‘ Behold, they load me with burdens till my back is like to break ; from dawn to set of sun my toil continueth ; and the reward thereof is blows and scantness!’

‘ Very sad!’ quoth Jupiter.

‘ But canst thou do nothing for me?’ inquired the ass.

‘ My dear long-ears,’ Jupiter answered, ‘ have I not already given thee a voice
and heels ?’

New Light.

A POET who had written many choice verses was bidden to the palace.

And being advised of his arrival, one of the princesses hastened from her bower to gaze upon him.

And behold he sat below the salt, partaking lustily of a pasty.

‘Heart and body o’ me!’ gasped the princess; ‘why, the fellow *eats*!’

Happy Thought.

A POOR man at the point of death called his sons and daughters together, and told them that though he was about to depart on a dark and lonesome journey, it gave him infinite joy to know that his going could not be made the occasion of quarrels amongst them. ‘For,’ said he, ‘I have neither lands, nor gear, nor moneys, nor other goods, over the division of which ye may wrangle.’

‘But, father,’ inquired one of the sobbing women, ‘which of us is to pay for the funeral?’

Specialists.

A MAN dwelt continually on the heights,
and wrote about 'life.'

And another man lived always in the
depths, and wrote dreams.

Pleased.

'TELL 's a tale,' quoth Bottom.

And the youth told him a tale that was
half a jest and half a sadness.

'You have some skill,' observed Bottom.
'Here are pence.'

Aspiration.

'AH, how I wish that I were white!' sighed
the red rose.

'That is very singular,' said the nightingale,
'for just now the white rose told me that she
would give a whole June dawn if she might
be red.'

'Quite so,' answered the red rose. 'But
then, you see, she *is* white!'

The Way.

'Now!' cried the reviewers, 'here is a pedestal for you—up you go!'

'Gentlemen,' blubbered Patient Merit, 'you are *too* kind! . . . But help me up!'

And they helped him up.

And when he was well posed they proceeded to throw potsherds at him.

Caution.

'We shall be very happy,' blushed the minor Muse. 'I have groves, and bees, and brooks that sing, and fields of lilies where it is always June.'

'And how about food?' inquired the boy.

'Jove—*hear* him!' cried the Muse.

Definition.

'You call him poet!' quoth the shepherd. 'What is it to be a poet?'

'Why, marry,' quoth the fool, "'tis to sit in the sun and think of a sweet word, and then to think of the fellow to 't.'

Defect.

A WISE man looked at the world, and laughed.

And an altruist offered him reproof, saying, 'There is occasion for tears, one would think!'

'Tears of blood are not to be compassed by all of us,' answered the wise man.

Capital.

I DREAMED a dream. And I saw in my dream one who smiled fatly in a blessed place. And round him moved the beatific host.

And I looked into his face and knew him for a battener on interest and dividends, a distrainer for rent, a smug and self-satisfied payer of meagre wages, a contriver of means to take something from everybody.

And I said to the spirit nearest me, 'How cometh he among you?'

And the spirit answered, 'Capital, my friend, Capital!'

Which was absurd.

The Reviewed.

A MAN, sitting upon a wall, was approached by a stranger, who whistled in his face and said, 'That is music: give me your opinion of it.'

'Dulcet!' remarked the man. 'But I have heard better.'

Then the stranger dropped, as in an agony, and beat the ground, and cried: 'Let me die, let me die; I am robbed of my reputation!'

The Bondman.

'THY master hath used thee with such cruelty,' quoth the king, 'that I make no difficulty in giving thee thy freedom, here and now.'

And the slave wept tears of joy.

'And,' continued the king, 'if I add, of my bounty, twenty pieces of gold, what, prithee, wilt thou do with them?'

'Good, my lord,' blubbered the other, 'an the money be sufficient, I will go forth and purchase me a slave!'

Gustatory.

'MY stomach is my chiefest tax,' quoth the poor man.

'Ay,' answered the fool. 'Yet it is comforting to reflect that the more thou eatest, the richer waxeth he that selleth thee food!'

Truth.

'THE truthful man cannot be confounded,' said the philosopher.

'Possibly not,' observed the Judge; 'but let him pray that he never come to a difference with a really competent liar.'

Played Out.

WAR went down the street threatening, and shaking her fist, and the little boys shouted 'Hooray!'

And Peace looked up contentedly from his ledger, and said, 'Foolish woman!'

Contradiction.

'FOOTLE!' said one reviewer.

'Fine work!' said another.

'I am persuaded that both of you are right,' said the author.

Sad.

A MAN had gifts and nothing else. So that he wrote and wrote, and lived the life of unmoneyed people.

And hints of his squalor were carried to certain inspired persons of means, who said, 'It is a pity he is so clever.'

Sere.

THEY went with garlands to a grizzled poet, and cried, 'Let us be merry—you are come into your kingdom!'

'Eh?' said the poet.

'You are come into your kingdom, and it is meet that you rejoice!'

'Oh!' said the poet.

Succour.

A MERCHANT chanced on an evil day to lose his all. So that he came suddenly to the dogs.

And then he bethought him of certain friends of his and informed them of his plight.

And one of them called and gave him a shilling, and another sent an old coat, and a third sent a pair of clouted shoes.

And never having speculated upon the nature of the human heart, the merchant was astonished.

Useful.

THE small birds decided to give a concert. And the linnet went round and invited the sparrow.

‘Thanks,’ said the sparrow; ‘but my voice is neither here nor there.’

‘Come—and bring your family!’ cried the linnet. ‘So many of us have volunteered to warble that we are bound to be badly put to it for an audience.’

The Debtor.

QUOTH the rat, 'Bunny is a scoundrel, a rogue, a cheat, an obscene and blasphemous person. He is of low birth. He eats with his knife. He drinks, and puts his money on wrong horses. He would cut a throat as lieve as look at you, and rob the dead of their grave-clothes. Gyves, stripes, and hanging were too good for him!'

Quoth the ape, 'What hath he done?'

'Done! Why, he owes me twenty shillings!'

Hard.

A COMPANY of Socialists caught a peer alive.

And the peer dropped on his knees and cried, 'Kind gentlemen, you are welcome to all my belongings, but for the love of Heaven do not kill me.'

And they laughed and said, 'Have no fear. We merely desire that thou should'st labour a little and so get thyself meat and drink honestly.'

'Worse and worse!' moaned the peer.

Comfort.

A WISE book and a foolish book lay waiting review.

‘They are a long time coming,’ whispered the wise book. ‘Really, I begin to feel quite nervous.’

‘Pooh!’ laughed the foolish book. ‘The chances are that they will never see us; and, in any case, it is pretty sure to be my turn first.’

The Man and his Wife.

A MAN married a wife and had peace with her until he happened to say something that displeased her, when she took upon herself the guise of a viper, and stung him and put venom into the wounds. And he was sore, and afraid.

And he went with his tale to a wise woman, and begged of her to advise him what he should do.

‘Grin and bear it,’ laughed the woman. ‘They are all like that.’

Female.

'YEARS of fasting and meditation have brought me to the possession of a wonderful truth,' remarked the old wise man.

'Discover it unto us,' commanded the king.

'Let me whisper,' said the old wise man.

And he whispered, 'The Devil — is a WOMAN!'

'I have suspected as much myself,' quoth the king, who had just returned from his honeymoon.

Probed.

'AN thy skill be sufficient,' quoth the king, 'the place is thine. . . . But I doubt thy skill.'

'My lord,' protested the lutanist, 'I ask for nothing better than a trial.'

'Well, we will have them bring thee instruments. Meanwhile, what thinkest thou of mankind?'

'Rogues all!'

'Now I know that thou'rt an ill performer,' quoth the king.

The Difference.

‘SIR,’ said the man, ‘you treat me less mercifully than you would treat your dog.’

‘Doubtless,’ replied the master ; ‘but then I have an affection for my dog.’

Oblivion.

‘WE write beautiful things that men may forget them,’ quoth a poet.

‘Yet who keeps count of all the roses?’ quoth another.

The Beautiful Woman.

IN Samothrace there lived a woman who was passing beautiful. And many brave men came to woo her, but she denied them all. And one, bolder than the rest, inquired of her if she took no thought of the time when her beauty should fade and vanish away.

And she answered him, saying, ‘That is just the reason why I will not trust myself with any of you.’

Three Singers.

‘I CELEBRATE the dawn,’ said the lark.

‘I charm the starry dusk,’ said the night-
ingale.

‘I chirp through all the towns,’ said the
sparrow.

Prospect.

A YOUTH courted the Muse.

And one day she said to him, ‘You are
dreadfully solemn—why do you not laugh
sometimes?’

‘It is because I love you so,’ he answered.

‘We shall make a pretty humdrum couple,’
cooed the Muse.

Hit.

‘I AM reformed!’ cried the prodigal. ‘I
drink no more; I dice no more; no longer
do I live loosely!’

‘Which means,’ observed one to whom
he spake, ‘that all thy moneys are spent.’

Point of View.

LIFE scourged him down the ways. And in his smart he railed against Life.

Then he saw Death.

‘Oh, delicate Life!’ he said.

The Secret.

QUOTH the fool to the poor man, ‘Cast thine eyes upon my lord; consider his lands, his castles, his equipages, his lacqueys, his trulls, his huntings and maskings and feastings with the king. He handles broad pieces of gold as they were pebbles, and hazards on the turning of a die moneys enow to keep twenty common men fat and comfortable for a year. And yet, mark me, his estates wax greater and greater, and his coffers fuller and fuller day by day. Shall I discover to thee how he compasseth it all?’

‘Ay, marry, do!’

‘Simply by keeping his hand continually in the pockets of such persons as thou.’

‘I shouldn’t ha’ thought it,’ observed the poor man.

The Pilgrims.

ON the road to the shrine of Saint Thomas, a rich man, well mounted, overtook a poor man, afoot.

‘Whither away, sirrah?’ queried the rich man.

‘I go, sir,’ replied the poor man, ‘to the shrine of Saint Thomas.’

And thou goest on Shank’s pony, I see!’

‘Having no horse or other beast to carry me, I walk.’

‘Well,’ observed the rich man, ‘walking is a healthy and a pleasant exercise; and thou that toilest to this shrine shalt no doubt receive a greater blessing than I, who proceed in comparative comfort.’

‘That may be, sir,’ responded the other, ‘but you will get there *first*!’

Revision.

‘TRUTH is mighty, and will prevail,’ said John.

‘But we manage these things differently in France,’ said Jacques.

The Mirror and the Maid.

THE maid looked into the mirror, and the mirror said, 'Thou art fair.'

'Flatterer!' answered the maid.

But later she went out, and met one who spake unto her, saying, 'Sweetheart, thou art fair—fairer than queens or saints, or any that have beauty.'

And at night the maid looked again into the mirror, and whispered, 'Verily, there is truth in thee!'

'Ay, and for all that,' replied the mirror, 'this morning it was "Flatterer!" and I will be sworn that in years to come thou shalt say to me "Liar!"'

Giant Strides.

'SIR,' quoth Aspiration, 'will you be kind enough to direct me to Grub Street?'

'My dear boy,' replied Attainment, 'we have no Grub Street nowadays; we have Journalism.'

Disillusion.

HE awoke and found himself famous.

And on the tenth day he sat down to consider the position.

'This is not what I wanted at all,' mused he.

Geese.

A KING chanced to pass a flock of geese that were feeding upon a green. And they followed him with stretched necks and hisses. And marking this the king's page came up to drive them off.

'O insolent and temerarious fowl!' he cried, 'how dare you hiss at the king's majesty? Take heed that to-night ye shall be put to death.'

'Fair sir,' quoth the chief goose, 'I beg of you to have mercy; for no discourtesy was meant. Birds of our feather hiss at *everybody*.'

Family.

A PEARL that spent her days in a cushioned casket took great credit to herself on account of her refinement and high breeding.

And at midnight, as she meditated delicately, there appeared to her the spirit of an oyster, still redolent of the fish-stall and strong vinegars.

Shuddering, the pearl cried, 'What foulness is this?'

'La sakes!' gibbered the shade. 'To think that my poor sister's child should address me thus!'

Woman.

A KNIGHT fell into great extremity through love of a maiden. And he sent his page unto her with a sonnet and fair words. But she said to the page, 'Tell thy master that, though his verses be pretty, I do not love him.'

Then the knight sold his lands to the Jews, and with the money thus obtained, purchased a diamond that had been stolen out of

Tartary, and was esteemed one of the richest jewels in the world. This he sent to the maiden with a greeting, and further words such as are used by them that woo. And the maiden weighed the diamond in her hand, and whispered, 'It is very beautiful; but I do not love him.'

Whereupon the knight went forth into strange countries, and slew divers dragons and evil persons; so that his deeds and the name of his love became famous throughout Christendom. And after many days he returned, and sought that maiden in her garden, and told his heart unto her at length; entreating her to wife. And she answered, 'Sir Knight, I will be thy sister; but I am promised in marriage to the king's son.'

Sore stricken by which tiding, the knight withdrew himself to the outer wall of the pleasaunce, and there fell upon his sword and died miserably.

And when the maiden heard of it, she made a great to-do, crying, 'Alack-a-day and woe's me! *for I loved him!*'

But she married the king's son all the same.

Deduction.

A HUSBANDMAN made his way into a great city, where he speedily found himself on excellent terms with starvation.

And one day his yearning for a crust of bread became so fierce that he hunted out a benevolent-looking citizen and begged an alms of him.

Whereupon the citizen repaired hastily to an officer of the law, crying, 'Yonder fellow hath begged of me!' So that the husbandman was seized and shut up in prison for the space of seven days.

And being released, he chanced by good fortune to obtain employment on the city quays. And that same morning he fell incontinently into the river, but, giving no sign, was not missed by his fellows till he had well-nigh drowned.

And as they fished him out one of them said, 'What manner of dolt art thou that fallest into water and criest not for help?'

'Help, quotha!' replied the husbandman. 'I asked a man for help t'other day, when I was like to die for want of a little bread, and got thrust into gaol for my pains!'

Lucre.

A MAN clamoured for an audience with the king.

‘What is your business?’ demanded the chamberlains.

‘I have a scheme for saving his Majesty’s soul.’

And they smiled and drove him away.

Next day he came again. ‘This fellow was here yesterday,’ quoth the chamberlains.

‘What is it now?’

‘I wish to see the king on a great matter.’

‘How so?’

‘I have a scheme for paying off the National Debt.’

And again he was driven away.

And he came a third time; and perceiving him, the chief chamberlain said, ‘Give that man a bag of gold, and tell him to depart out of these realms, ere his neck be stretched.’

And the man took the gold, saying, ‘Why could you not have given me this at first? Money was all I wanted.’

The Wicked Husband.

‘I HAVE a sore trouble,’ sobbed the woman.

‘What is it?’

‘My husband no longer loves me!’

‘Riots at his club, and makes no joy of his hearth, so to say?’

‘Precisely!’

‘Then I shall give you a philtre—a liquor, madam, concocted from the rarest essences, and potent to rehabilitate the most attenuated affection. Let your husband take thirty drops of it daily, concealed in his meat. That he may do this with the greater readiness, I would advise you to prepare and set before him such dishes as you know he best delights in; also to smile upon him opportunely, so that he will eat his fill and be at ease. Come again in a month!’

And in a month’s time the woman returned.

‘Oh, sir,’ she cried, ‘may Heaven prosper you! My husband is himself again!’

‘All being now well?’

‘Yes! And I have brought back the phial, which please replenish for me.’

‘That will not be necessary, madam. But you may continue the food and the smiling.’

Vanity.

'Go forth,' said the king to his fool, 'and bring me the vainest of my subjects.'

And the fool went forth, and conversed with dancing-masters, and play-actors, and reviewers of small verse, and millionaires, and labour candidates. But none of them seemed to touch high-water mark in the matter of conceit, and the fool began to quake for his reputation.

Until one day, at the eastern gate of the city, he met a hoary beggar, who asked an alms of him, saying, 'Good fellow, though I beg, yet am I a gentleman born. In days gone by I squandered money like dust, and my wine, and my women, and my horses were the finest in the country. And if ye know anything of courts, ye will have heard how, in the last king's reign, there flourished a young squire, of whom it was said "that he never spent a shilling where a pound might do, and refused nothing to nobody that was fair and brazen enough." You see before you, sir, all that remains of that same person!'

'Surely,' remarked the fool, 'this must be my man.'

The Affable Man.

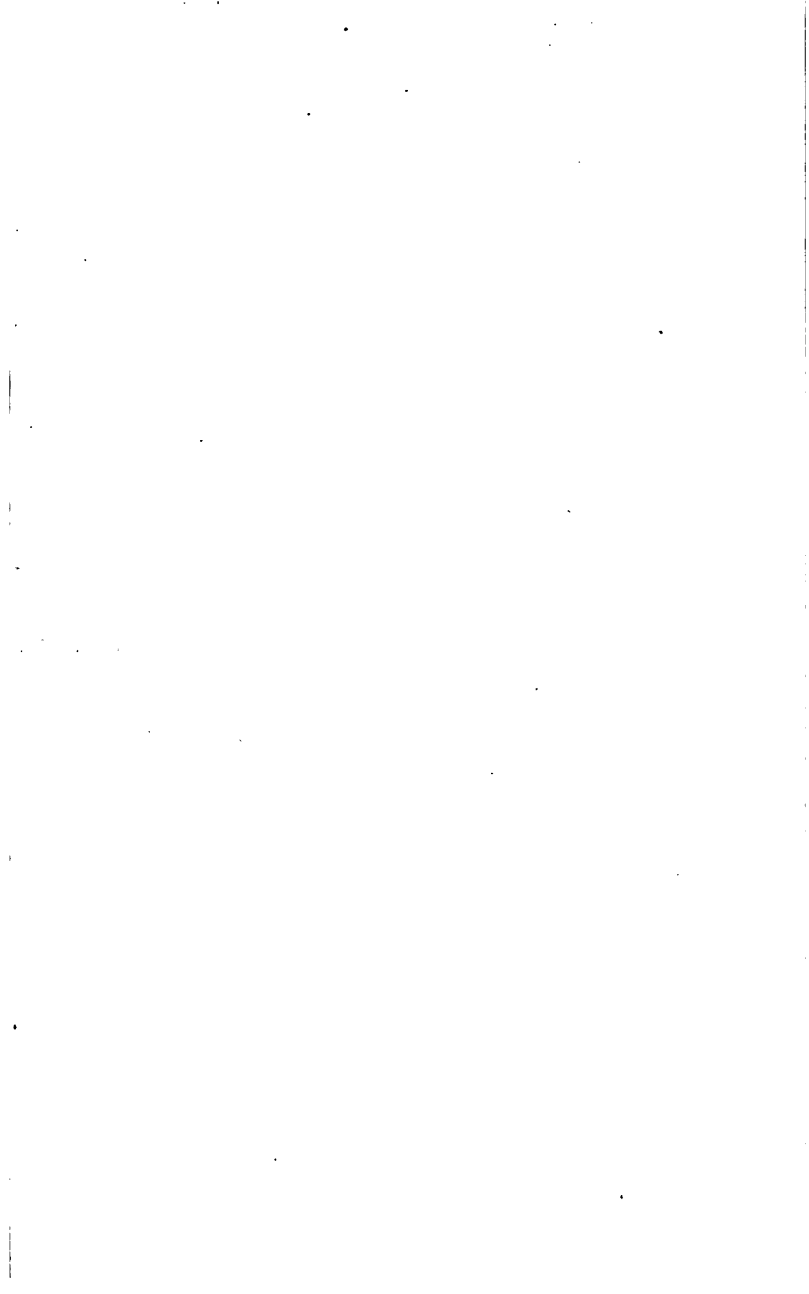
A MAN who exuded affability, and whose speech was compliment, met a brawny fish-wife that squinted and had a broken nose.

‘Poor creature,’ reflected the affable man, pained by her ugliness, ‘I will say soothing things to her, so that for once in a way she may be happy.’

And smiling affably he adventured, ‘Good soul, we live in a sad world, but rest assured that virtue is better than beauty, and a homely countenance much to be preferred to an evil conscience.’

Whereupon the woman fell into a fury, and assailed him with blows and objurgations.

And the affable man did not understand it at all.





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